BIG ON BARRA

The sustainable food movement has consumers caring more about what they eat and where it comes from. And this Territory business is leading the way.

STORY ELLIE TURNER PHOTOGRAPHY HELEN ORR

BUYING Australian seafood instead of imported can cost more, but the real price of failing to support local industries would be unbearable for the NT — something consumers have realised.

Humpy Doo Barramundi Farm, a family-owned and run business on the edge of the Adelaide River, harvests and packs an average 30 tonnes of barra every week to feed interstate and Territory markets.

Owner Dan Richards, whose children are fifth-generation Territorians, says: “There is a lot of talk about developing the north. We’re fifth generation Territorians, says: “There is a lot of talk about developing the north. We’re doing it.”

RISKY BUSINESS

The biggest predator of a farmed barramundi is its pondmates.

The Humpy Doo Barramundi Farm nursery grades the little fellas, separating them by size to stop the bullies eating the shy ones before they graduate to the big-fish ponds, which are fed by water from the tidal section of the river and bordered by floodplains at Middle Point.

Mr Richards said barras, cannibals by nature, eat other fish head first. “Sometimes you end up with a two-tailed barramundi,” he said.

“If the victim is spat out, its face gets all scratched up and it will be blinded, so it is really important we stop the fish doing that. The genetic stock we use now are very placid, but we had one that looked like a hammer. Barras hatchlings are tended gently in the nursery. When they arrive weighing just 0.1g from a Queensland hatchery. Some are har vested at “plate size”, but about 85 per cent are grown for two years until they reach a “fillet-sized” 3-5kg.

Until last month the harvest involved netting the river and bordered by floodplains at Middle Point. The workers, responsible for running various harnesses and Australian produce.

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Most is sent south, but some is brought 70km west to Darwin, to the fish markets, fine dining restaurants – and to supermarkets, after the Federal Government continues to mull over the implications of national legislation in line with the laws the NT established seven years ago.

Mr Richards said consumers had become more passionate about supporting local businesses and Australian produce.

“They have a right to know where their food comes from and make an informed decision about whether to buy imported or Australian,” he said.

Mr Richards is a part owner in the farm with his step-mum Julie Tyson and his dad Bob Richards, who bought into the business in 1994 after his first year of humble operation producing about 6kg a week.

One of the founding shareholders was a man named Max Williams. His daughter Tarn met Dan Richards at Casuarina Senior College and they are now married with three children — Isabel, 9, Cameron, 7 and Alex, 4.

Mr Richards said the farm’s barramundi production had trebled in the past three years, and attrib-